Signet
74

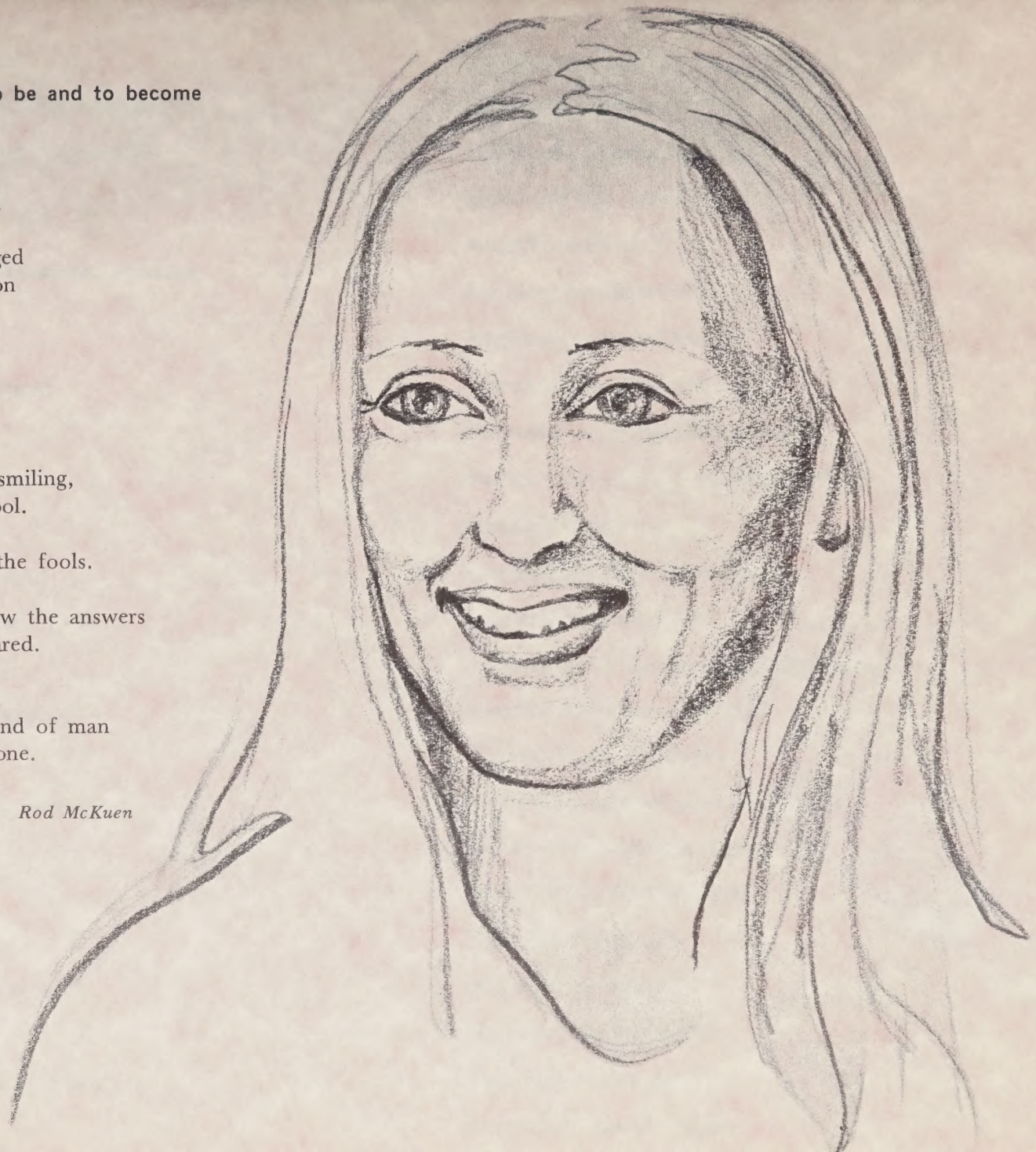
**To MIDGE MERRICK who longed to be and to become**

It can be said of him as of few men,
he did not fear the weather and did
not trim his sails but instead challenged
the wind itself to improve its direction
and to cause it to blow more softly
over the world and its people.

Here he comes again, head high and smiling,
Shakin' down the world, playin' it cool.
He smiles as though he never been
Hunted by the crowd, beaten by all the fools.

Think of all the men, who never knew the answers
Think of all those who never even cared.
Still there are some who ask why,
Who want to know, who dare to try.
Every now and then we meet that kind of man
Here he comes again and now he's gone.

*Rod McKuen*



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Let us take a walk . . .
one which incorporates all senses.
The issues discussed
were never made up without the assistance
of another.
Let us take a walk
    through the ever-expanding fields
opened up
in the casual manner of being and knowing.

Come . . . take my hand
    let us visit this land
    where memories are important
    where you can be like you want to be

Let us take this one more walk
    not a conclusion of the many we have taken
    but a continuation of the one we began
        not too long in the past

There is no need for completion of this walk
    the memories are many
    hopes are just as varied
    but our friendship shall continue
    like the many issues we invented.

This is the time
    when we must look at the memories
    but continue to move with the change of traffic.
    No end has come
        there's time for that in tomorrows
So . . . let us continue the walk we began
        not so long ago in the past.

*Emily Nixon*

jen ran out into the sunshine. she soaked up it's warmth and mirrored it back with her own.

jenny walked in the rain. she had lost her umbrella and the cold soaked through to her soul.

jennifer wandered in the falling snow, lost and alone. the snow stuck to her frozen heart.

*Pat Duncan*

# THE MORNING BEAT

This morning K- and I pressed
the door open
into the dewy darkness
of three o'clock
We edged the moldy mat
into place:
it looked milky in the moonlight
and alluring
to
the squatty man
looking into the back window
K- and I scampered off, our bare feet splattering
like loud raindrops
on the newly-tarred street.
We slid through the wet hedge,
the prickling branches
swatted
our naked legs
We hurtled the stream
scaring a family of deer who flew away
over high fog
Imitating them
K- and I, legs spread,
bounced back across the silent stream
then back to the other side
then back again.

Before our mud-soaked toes had tired
the lake gleamed ahead
Hair tangling
eyes squealing with ready
K- and I untangled our windblown arms
and tousled body from the big shirts
shifting
in our hurry
fresh like that morning
we pounced upon the still
cloud-lit
water:
I streamed underneath the surface (the water leached
my breath)
just to surface for my lungs to applaud
each gasp of
cool moonlit air
My body skimmed the black water
like the floating dock bobbing peacefully
in front of me
up and down, up and down
into the morning beat

*Sue Sublett*

First child ---
    will you stand hoarding air or
in belly-sprawls lie listening
to the wind that you have cornered;
    while imaginations, drifting,
plant with pinwheels, thoughts
    of five-legged mares
and grazing dream-cats, lazy
    on a trellised hill?

If so, first child
    in hoarding, cull the winds
ignore the patterns, lifting
from the breeze of pinwheels planted
by the fence, the breath of mares
        whose smooth flanks quivered
waiting while you listened still.

*Cyndy Anchors*

## SHE

There she sits in the afternoon shadows
watching me

she moves, and disappears
blending her black
with the black curtain
that hangs from the day

sitting in the window, breathing the
silence
whispering words i thought i knew

go to sleep, purring sweet dreams
rest, the cat stalks at night
close your eyes
drifting, weightless, in space to
your own place

there, your planet boasts two moons,
blue and shining,
and seven seasons

together we will chase spirits,
gold and gray
and if we run hard and far . . .

maybe, we will find your other life
beyond the jungle, lost

*Anne Phillips*

# PICTURES

A picture is imprinted upon my mind
concerning the way things used to be
between the two of us . . .
you and me.
We lived in total oblivion to the people
around
all we enjoyed was
nature
you and me.
We used to walk down the streets of many
places
far and near
until we had covered almost every section
between here and there.
We learned to love the beauty of
quiet
because it gave us such a secure feeling

We actually saw the naturalness of life
doomed to destruction by man
the trees we wanted to make our own
the leaves we walked upon
the flowers that bloomed
    some early some late
followed us throughout our walks.
We learned to love
you and me
the natural things of life.
we watched the sun rise
to the beating of butterfly wings
and caterpillar nests
and saw it set with the frogs that
followed us everywhere we went
you and me.
We grew together
through this naturalness
to enjoy what once
we took for granted.

We together equaled one
our love became what neither one of us
you and me
had ever experienced
through the walks we took to places
here and there.
We parted
you and me
when we lost the sense of quiet and honesty
we had found
We went for walks until that time
you and me
no longer completely oblivious to the people
around us
but more aware of the beauty
and naturalness of what became a part of us
through our walks
you and me.

*Emily Nixon*

## NIGHT TRIPPER

The night tripper treads softly,
Cutting capers along the lane.
Just what this strange creature is
Would be difficult to ascertain.

His feet are shod in white satin;
In the night they dimly glow.
His silken robe billows about
As the gentle breezes blow.

Night tripper pauses now and then
Staring greedily at the moon.
He craves that beautiful, shining orb;
She'll be one of his treasurers soon.

This slight, mystical being
Is never seen by mortal eye.
He frequents the peaceful countryside
Where the curious are never nigh.

Night tripper never travels by day,
For he only loves the night.
When day has died, he will emerge
And let his fancy take full flight.

*Ellen Troutman*

## SHORE THOUGHTS

The wave came
And encircled our feet
Burying them in the sand.
Then it left again,
Leaving a clam.
The clam just lay there
We didn't want to disturb it.
Then in a quick wink
It stuck out its foot
And dug itself into the sand.
Then it was gone.
Like the wave.
But sometime it will return
To eat
And travel.
Then, it will leave again.
And we will be there again,
To watch
And think
And be happy.

*Joan Oviatt*

# LOVE SONG

I've always remembered you
holding my doorway up
with
the withering sleeve
of your blue-jean jacket.
Your tousled hair seemed to mingle
with the corner
of your smile
like sister Katherine's hands
collapsing in prayer.
Your hazy eyes always smiled before your lips though
and one grinned more than the other
until it matched all the wrinkles
which darted
from the corner
of those sure eyes

And I remember how you watched Sunday melt into Monday
more than once:

sprawling in my fields
like a black-eyed Susan
(following the day into night into day again)
you swayed
with the wind
into sun
into shade

But your eyes always seemed to laugh
and sometimes
your mouth would tag along too
(like the sun following the clouds into dusk)

They were always the first up in the morning
along with the milkman
and my cough
and
I've often wondered if you stayed awake all night
to see everything through the darkness and
before me
You always seemed to anyway

*Sue Sublett*

Claire likes to plan ahead. She smoothes the domestic way for Jake. System. Near her, you find yourself breathing an atmosphere of brick-like molecules that clothe her planetary self. To make certain nothing happens, Claire attaches printed notes to things:

DO NOT USE IN HIGH WINDS

DUMP DAILY

BOLT ON WEEKENDS

DO NOT RUN

KEEP DIAL ON KDKA

Claire always cuts her gin with vodka and keeps dry vermouth in a squeeze bottle. She bakes a terrific baklava and in general runs a taut ship.

Uncle Jake bought her a small bungalow with a white fence and roses. She plans to live there when Jake's gone.

Their daughter is my favorite kissing cousin. A multi-minded woman in her forties, Mem can say "shit" and a whole bunch of other unpleasant words without even flinching and in a normal tone of voice. She and her husband are going to visit the island this weekend. At Mem's approach, Claire looks as if she were leaning into a storm. Mem keeps house casually. It's a place to keep yourself warm and dry. She's also accident prone. When her husband found out about this after they were married, he got her some double-indemnity insurance. Their kids raise gerbils and have never heard of mowing grass.

Somehow I must have had a place in Claire's weekend plans from the beginning. She walked up to my window Tuesday morning after the mail had come in to clarify the schedule for Saturday and Sunday, inquiring diplomatically if Barb and I had "anything planned" like dinner at our place or something. With Mem and Rich. I hadn't really thought of it, but allowed we'd get together. To visit. Nothing special. Anyway, Claire warned that I should keep in touch and that we should coordinate our efforts. With a roast in the freezer, it's important to decide if and when to thaw it out. It's reasonable enough. She's got a problem, I thought, and then forgot about it. For some of us, the moon is posted like an agenda. For others, like Mem, it's a moon. She never writes notes to herself. She's on her own.

Only yesterday, while returning from the mainland, my mother-in-law ran into Claire on the ferryboat. Claire kept trying to get the inside dope on weekend dinner plans. Mother sympathized, but could offer no information. There wasn't any. She had just caught a whiff of that future rib-roast from off the lake when Claire changed the subject. Something about exchanging a pair of pants for her husband. By then, cars were being driven onto the dock. A ride on a ferryboat isn't an ocean voyage.

Jake wouldn't go to the mainland himself to exchange the pants. He was too agitated after Mrs. McLeod ran into him at the Island Store. So Claire had to take the mashed-up pet Chevy convertible in for repairs. Jake's got to be careful. He had a heart attack last year and spent the entire summer out here under the cherry trees in this

one-room furnished gazebo staying away from boats, people and trouble. Very smart. He studied his new limitations. And so Jake washed his hands of the whole mess, disappeared into his steamboat gothic summer-mansion, climbed upstairs and took to his bed. As any normal healthy man would do. And Claire set out for the mainland yesterday to have the scratch fixed.

Mem and Rich are supposed to get here sometime this evening on the six or the eight o'clock boat. And I'm jotting down a few little things just to keep in shape. In case inspiration strikes. I don't think I asked Mother to pick up a bottle of booze for me on the mainland. Damn. If I'd written a note. Claire would have....But then Rich doesn't drink and Mem likes her beer with ice in it.

! ! The back door slammed.

Claire's coming, closing in on the gazebo where her nephew is guest "Writer in Residence." Jake drops in, but more casually. Usually to get my reading of a crossword problem. Lavabo? Mir or Mere? And sometimes he'll turn in out of the hot sun, park his self-propelled mower and let it idle there while he delivers a piece of news or some advice. The news is not always as fresh and exciting as Claire's, but the advice is not bad. Like how to keep mosquitos, gnats and june bugs out of the gazebo. He worked out that problem last summer.

Claire approaches with a firm step, proving by the way that firm steps can be taken in freshly-cut grass, and even in tennis shoes, without detracting from the grandeur.

Claire is in a strut. Glaring in at me through the screen she is the perfect customer with a complaint. My biased window, bevelled into the corner of this borrowed gazebo, has a porch-like triangular patch of sill outside. It's elbow high and a great place to chin, but today it is her chopping block and rostrum. Should this bankteller argue through the grille or hand over the swag in unmarked bills of modest denominations? Clowning's out when I hear Claire's aggrieved, tight-throated reproach, "You didn't tell me your plans!"

She's right. That frozen standing rib roast had completely slipped my mind. As if in retribution, the ineffable roast glides into my candle-lit imagination, pauses aromatically on its crazed victorian platter, then fades away like an edible Cheshire Cat. Coming to, I explain, with a vague smile, that I had adopted a sort of wait and see policy, specifically, of course, hoping for the best. After all, in general, who can tell what the future has in store?

Claire's look tells me that I should have given this weekend more serious consideration, if only to ease her uncertainty. Now what will she do, especially since she and Jake are flying to the coast on Sunday after Communion and that would leave only Saturday for the roast? She does care. Enough to plan the very best. And I feel ashamed somehow as she turns away and marches back to the house. In her navy-blue sneakers. The door slams. Decisively.

Jake has just come out of the garage to burn some trash. He's still a Fire Department Volunteer. Standing at the incinerator watching for sparks, he snacks on a banana. It's good for him. He hears me

typing all this and ambles over to the window-patch and tells me through the screen and the last of the banana that I should put the windows all the way up or all the way down if I want to keep out the pests. He's figured it all out and that's his frank advice.

Jake is good at crossword trivia, but he knows the main things even if it doesn't always show. Things like gazebo dynamics, lunar agendas and solar systems. I'll bet he already knew, what I would find out only later from Mem and Rich, that Claire at this moment, in her mind's kitchen, was grilling the hamburger patties.

*Dr. Edmund Weiant*

## BLACK ON WHITE

you say your good-bye
i feel mine in my throat
we've parted so many times
i should know that everytime i see you
you'll leave me
but it gets harder to watch you go away

you and i loved yesterday
if only i could know how you feel
tomorrow might begin
us

that's the way it is
you want to touch
but all you can do is put black on white
fill the paper with words
words that come too slow
my words that try to say what i feel
i love you

*Lannette Sackett*

## STRAWBERRIES

I was sleeping
yesterday morning
in a strawberry patch
when someone rang my doorbell

I put on my robe
and opened the door to greet
the hopeful eyes of a
dirty elf of a man

He bowed with a jerk
introducing himself as
Mister Jezebel.
an old green hat
rested on his ears, which
provided convenient shelves

scratching the whiskers
on his red rash of a face
he shyly offered
a big tray of strawberries
propped on one shoulder.
they looked fresh and sweet
(and so much like the face of the old man)
I bought a basket.

He nodded quickly, mumbled something
and disappeared
before I could shut the door

I went back to bed
and ate the strawberries
with milk.
when I was finished
all that was left
were the tiny whiskers
floating in the white liquid.

*Helen West*

## SUNDAY, DEBBY AND ME

Take me back denim days
to a Lennon-McCartney song
Blaring from a thunderbird blue of a
much hugged
you
pick-a'lickin' Southern fried all anew
and Sunday cruising that radiorolling way
spinning down dusty

On rubber wide evils, sticking fast to gravetar

Oh, those pot holes sure knew me
So did that little faced town
that rubbed its eyes

As I, slow blistered
and wrapped in metal,
nodded a fiery halo goodbye

Mama, I'm just riding high

*Anne Phillips*

You stared at me
that day on the pier
dripping with salt-soaked seagulls
and bloody fishhooks
and waited for me to greet you with beckoning looks

My eyes jumped over you as I
too pre-occupied
swatted brazen flies
jumping from crab to spot
from fishpail to hook
You hungrily edged closer
reeling me
in and out
with your nicotine breath
which brushed
past me
still too busy with flies and fish

And as I reared near your tatooed arm
filled with cupids and hearts
I met your frank eyes
and
basking in their blue warmth

I begged
to become
a part of you.

*Sue Sublett*

2/23/55

let's hear it for rainbows,
pink noses and goldfish bowls
splattered head to toe
green paint on slightly faded jeans
it's you
freshly baked schemes and a year older
so what's the celebration
it's no secret, i know
the world's only a pair of baggy pants,
worn and sometimes a hard fit
but remember you're one of mankind's
better ideas
breathe deeply, baby
and let's hear it for audrey lee
happy birthday
– may all your friends wear
like quality red suspenders,
made-to-last

*Anne Phillips*

## UNCLE HAROLD AND THE CIRCUS

People always thought that Uncle Harold was content. He liked to curl up on the sofa after dinner with a cold beer, a popular magazine and a toothpick. He didn't work in the yard like the other men on the street but left the yard to Aunt Faye. She worked hard weeding the beds, fertilizing and planting grass to keep up appearances on the street of small neat wooden houses. But Uncle Harold had his dreams.

Every March when the Circus came to town, Aunt Faye began to get nervous. She never talked much about it but we could always tell because she tried to hide the morning paper as long as she could from Uncle Harold. She would hurry him out the door to the motorcycle shop where he was assistant mechanic before he could see a large picture of an elephant or clown which would start the familiar conversation.

"Say, Faye," he would remark, "Guess what's coming this week. Hot dog. The circus. Did I ever tell you about the time I watered the elephants for a whole three days for a free ticket. Me and my brother, Burt."

"Yes, Harold," Faye always replied.

"Well listen, that was the hottest March in this town and those elephants drank water from sunup to sundown. We breathed so much sawdust that our mouths were gritty for days." He slapped his leg and grinned.

"Well, Harold, if it was so unpleasant why do you talk about it so much."

"Hell, Faye, who said it was unpleasant. Those clowns were real people, Faye, behind that makeup. They liked to play gin and let us watch too. And the trapese artists clicking on the swings up there in the lights in their pink and blue tights and black eyelashes. Did I ever tell you about the night one missed and nearly broke all his bones even in the net?"

"Yes, Harold, you told me."

"I sure would like to join up with them. I sure would."

"Yes, Harold, and I'd like to be Queen for a Day. Come on, we're sixty years old. A few more years and we are ready for a move to maybe Florida or Georgia where it's warm."

"And a lot of people, Faye, a lot of people. Well, get my lunch. I'm off." He planted a greasy kiss on her moist forehead.

One year, the Circus came in April instead of March and Uncle Harold was laid off from the shop with a broken finger.

At breakfast Faye spotted the picture of the elephant staring up from the paper in Harold's bandaged hand. "Okay, Faye. No excuses this time. Since I can't work, I might as well enjoy myself."

After Harold left the house, Faye poured a second cup of black coffee, ran a comb through her faded red hair, pulled her chenille robe around her and sat with her head on her hand thinking. "I might like it too," she thought.

That afternoon, they climbed into the pickup and headed down the road into town. The traffic was heavy with mothers in station wagons on the way to school to pick up their pigtailed and base-

balled capped children. Faye remembered that she and Harold had raised two without station wagons and baseball teams and they had turned out just fine. One was a drug store manager down in Alabama and the other a regular Army man in Germany.

"We raised good kids, Harold," she thought aloud.

"They got out of this small town, by God. Brave too."

Faye looked at him out of the corner of her eye but his face had not changed expression. He just looked calm like Harold always looked.

Seated on the third row, Faye balanced a coke in one hand and peanuts in the other. Harold stood craning his neck looking for the circus parade to begin. In front of them two twins dressed alike in frilly dresses tugged on their heavy blond mother demanding goods from each tray that passed on the arms of enthuiastic-voiced but blank-eyed vendors. Soon the whistle blew and the ringmaster took his place. The circus began. From ring to ring Faye watched the action. Harold watched too but he mostly looked at the tent flap for the appearance of the elephants. He commented that the clowns were not quite as able as the clowns in his circus but the costumes were right colorful. Act followed act - acrobats in black tights caught one another like feather pillows, the trapese artists swung through the air rhythmically catching their partners sweaty wrists-just in time-to the pleased roar of the crowd. The elephants filed into the tent swaying their large gray masses like native women with baskets on their heads. They were guided into the ring by a rather stern looking Mexican and a small dark woman in a green ballet dress.

"Here they are, Faye, here they come." Harold had not spoken throughout the circus but had watched each act carefully nodding his approval, occasionally holding his bag of peanuts between his lips to slap his good hand on his knee. He was animated and punched Faye in the side, "Look honey. Why that has to be old Nell."

"Who?" Faye asked with no emotion in her voice.

"Hell, Old Nell's that elephant. The one I told you took a liking to me and rubbed my hand with her trunk every time I came up with water. You know who Old Nell is, Faye. See that's her - the one with the green ribbon on her head."

"Elephants don't live that long, Harold. That's been fifty years."

"Who says they don't. Why that elephant's bound to be Nelly or maybe her daughter. You don't know nothing, Faye." His eyes glistened with excitement.

Four days after the Circus, Uncle Harold had his cast removed. He left the house as usual, drank his two cups of coffee, kissed Aunt Faye like he always did, drove away in the old pickup. Aunt Faye didn't cry when she saw that his three everyday shirts were missing. In fact life moved on each day like it always did only she did leave a light on in the window every night. When Uncle Harold's name was mentioned, it was not without pride that she said she knew where he was and that she knew he was okay. Folks had a hard time understanding why she wouldn't ever discuss Uncle Harold's disappearance and why she seemed so cheerful.

One day a month or two after Uncle Harold's mysterious disappearance, Cousin Ned stopped in to tell Aunt Faye that he had spotted the old pickup in a town about forty miles away in front of a used car mechanic shop. On impulse he said he slowed down, recognized the Mason sticker on the back and stopped. When he went in there was Uncle Harold bending over an old car covered with grease. He knew it was Harold because he recognized his tatoo but he wouldn't answer when Ned called to him. Did she want him to go back and try again.

Aunt Faye answered, "No, Ned. Mind your business but thanks. She closed the door, but Uncle Ned said she had tears in her eyes.

That night the windows in her house were all dark.

*Clara Seagrave*

## TRIKU 2

First snow falling
To make the world more lovely
Catch in clothes and hair.
First snowfalkes falling
Silent as the autumn leaves
They are echoes of.
First snowflakes falling
Ballet dancers on the breeze
Too soon will be gone.

*Michael Fischer*

to Joyce Kilmer
Snow may pile to Kilmer's bosom

But these oaks will bear no sappy female whine--
heard only as they comfort robins breeding
with some foreign spring.

Leaf and branch may seek the warmth that suns extend,
Bark with intricate weaving
may groan with winter's weight to
shiver in ice casing,
darkened by some inward rain or melt
to suffer through false metaphor.
that impresses human face on trunks
forcing branch to pray
with human ceremony.

Winds may sing
sir but the song you hear will be no whistle.
leaves may rustle withit
but
no skirts are raised
in dance.

the root is ripped
sir
splintered against rock
that will not nurse its pulp.

*Cyndy Anchors*

## DANDELION

There were always some small yellow flowers
that came up in Gramma's yard

Dandelions
I was told.
"They're weeds"
"A nuisance".

I was told
"Go ahead and pick them"
I did
They were soft, and had an earthy smell
I held them in bunches
So pretty

There were always some big red flowers
growing in Gramma's garden

Roses
I was told
"They've cultivated"
"Precious"

I was told
"Don't pick them!"
I didn't

I was afraid of them --
their thorns and prickly stems,
a mask of perfume

I wondered at the rose
and became the dandelion's friend

*Helen West*

## ON TURNING TWENTY-ONE

On turning twenty-one
I awake
to find little has changed.

I'm another year older
but only one day older than yesterday.

Little has changed.
Today I buy my own rum
pay my own blue cross-blue shield
and
say goodbye to old years
young days

Little has changed.

*Sue Sublett*

Quiet as a city street at three A.M.
The silence here intensifies my sorrow.
You used to tell me to "Live for today."
You never warned me of tomorrow.

Our love was an incandecent rainbow
And the world could have sunken in the sea.
It wouldn't have mattered as long as I had you,
But rainbows won't glow with no 'lectricity.

I must prepare for the days that are ahead.
Your easy living was not where I fit in.
There could never be a compromise, and all we shared
was love,
So you left me lonely, only darkness as my friend.

The winter skies still hold their cold and windy grey,
Yet reaching through the snow, bold crocuses are blooming.
They can teach me that my tomorrow is still there.
Even though I am alone, I know my spring is coming.

*Pat Duncan*

It's a game of letters with thoughts
hard to convey
each hopes the other will
understand
while no attempt is made
to explain the misplaced
word
that said what was not
to be said.
The end came before the
beginning could
commence
both regret the thoughts
neither can convey
to the other of the hopes
they once had
together
shared through the letters.

*Emily Nixon*

## MOVING

There you sit
perched on the edge of the floor
between the kitchen and the dining room
both packed in boxes

Your legs curl
under you
like bird's feet gripping the wet bough
singing
of soft maple
as you rock
back and forth
back and forth
back and forth
in changing wind

It's empty here
with everything packed up (including our memories)
all nicely wrapped in yesterday's newspaper

*Sue Sublett*

## HALF-TRUTHS

(written in response to a plastic revolving crucifix found
in a roadside souvenir shop.)

What a placid, broken savior ---
pinned through the gut
like a wriggling bug, weakly
squirming in attempt to fight
the stench of chloroform.
The dirty joke of some obscene god
whose fat fingers have taken life,
guilded its edges there, with dirt
and set it down in ornament;
Such --- if all were here.

And yet, men are drawn ever to these potter's fields,
(to stir red dust with the heel of a shoe:
to grab a love by the neck and
choke it.
Dragging the corpse from denial to betrayal
to forgetfulness denied.

To pause, reflect, and hold the feel of
grainy soil beneath the finger's nail.)
where all is stilled, all at peace, at rest---
rotting in contemplation.

That muscles have ached.
That tendons, ripped, fired the body's roaring ---

*Cyndy Anchors*

The destruction of man is shown here
there's nothing grand about this place
it's all so drab and utterly useless
the sidewalk cracks are emaculatly spotless
surrounding a crewcut yard
with only one or two bald spots
which, quite naturally, are being transplanted
to give the healthy glow of something
totally absurd.
The proprietor of the estates
struts around like some cackling rooster
hands set on his hips
glaring at his slaves
His power is felt everywhere
even the birds and wind
stop their games
to tell him what they think
but his destruction continues
as he moves to another
corner of this place.

*Emily Nixon*

# SONG

I used to be my father's daughter
Then, my brother's sister
Now
I'm my husband's wife
and still no one knows who I am,
for I am smothered
under
dishes
and dust
a dog that limps
and a dead baby
I can't remember not being someone else's person
always
with an apostrophe
and someone else's status
hooked
on
Like a worm dangling on the end
of a line
I always catch someone else's fish

No thanks
No smiles
Just a bowed head
hovering
over Nixon's news
of a White House wedding
and a Christmas tree cradling
a nest in bending branches

So
I stand
dabbling in grimey water
topped with dead suds
and
sing unsung blues of a happy housewife.

*Sue Sublett*

*Christy Taylor*

*Lydia Staton*

The blistering sun stinging
through Aunt Sue's green-striped bandana
beat
her body
until it became part
of this brown earth
weathered and rounded

The wrinkles
in her sagging
brown face
folded
like the pleats
in the course muslin skirt
which consumed
her like the clouds
of dust
stirring as she shuffled
beside me

Hand-in-hand, we found the curves of the dusted road
which honored
honeysuckle and cool mint
and tasted
like nights rocking
on the collapsing porch at Aunt Sue's
The shade beckoned
our gritty feet so
eagerly we plodded
towards the cool of that day
under the maple branches
drooping with sap

Twenty toes touched the cool twilight
of crabgrass and endless
patches of clover-
all engulfed us:
the lowing breeze filled
with the cry of hawks
the hum of flies
the whisper of green

Together we sat under the full tree feeling

*Sue Sublett*

## KATHRYN

Holding the child that will not sleep,
we walk.
I walk, the child, the dog ---
a half-pint collie that had to be taught to nurse.
hand-raised to walk at dusk
and keep the child from sleep.
In the grey dusk the grey grass
stretches toward
smoked trees
to wait in silence
for the grey sounds of summer dusk.

In the grey grass are no lions,
no bear, no grey swan,
no deer to scare up,
no rabbit to give the dog a good run.
There is only the whine of mosquitoes,
only the whine of the night as it circles,
only the sleep-whine of the grey child,
dreaming of rabbits.

*Cyndy Anchors*

## FRENCH QUARTER

Nibbling on Aunt Sally's Original Recipe Pralines
We explored the streets of the
French Quarter
Peeking through shop windows
And standing opened-mouthed at the girls advertised on
Bourbon Street

We came to a park
Where pigeons perched on Jackson and his horse
And children hid behind azalea bushes.
A sidewalk framed the park
With artists of every age selling their works.

An old man chalking portraits for $3.00
Joked with a little girl in yellow
While he sketched the tiny mouth
And John F. Kennedy, Raquel Welch, and
A smiling mother watched.

*Helen West*

# NORMAN VINCENT PIG

a Pink pig

guards my money--a tithe more each month

It is fat

but impotent

(it is safe)

my money is safe

from

the crack in the floor

the kid next door

'cause

it's helpin' the poor

those suckled pennies

make wise

(utilize)

and

heal-the-eyes

of

the uncivilized

my dimes are worth:

the price of a birth

a mover of earth

a missionary of mirth

for

the needy

Pink pig

I pledge a nickle

to your hanging jowls

which sounds a dull thud

in your sterile bowels

*Helen West*

## SHARON'S LITTLE SONG

wake-up, you fuzzy and yellow as a caterpillar
open your eyes, blue dancing
and come, discover the day
eat your cereal and kiss daddy bye-bye
the morning calls your name
run, sweet baby, into the orchards
and play hide 'n seek with peach trees
ah, that silly old cloud will never catch you
laughing and golden, tumble into the grass
let the green tickle your nose, pink with sunshine
quietly on tiptoes, boasting more than dimples can,
coming closer, tiny ballerina, performance in butter-
cups
oh, the time that floated away, bright and red,
when the string slipped through your fingers
away, into the sky, frosted in sun-light
can you remember, my friend
close your eyes and see a child, light as her years
running beside a breeze, breathing
sitting on mama's lap, listening to the moonlight,
living
listening, dreaming
breathing, living, dreaming
wake-up, this is your life song
the words have faded past the shadows of the
peach trees
but you can still hum the tune, so remember
hum softly, on mornings when someone seems
to whisper,
Sharon, discover yourself, Sharon . . .

*Anne Phillips*

You stole my heart

my laugh

my smile

stayed a while, then

moved on to

charm another.

All alone,

sad,

withdrawn

Love is gone.

I am as

jealous of your lover as a

Dirty city is of dawn.

*Pat Duncan*

## GHOSTS

Ghosts dance around the Christmas tree
visit me.

Puffed white wrinkled face,
cracked like dry Greek pastry,
tries to smile
when fear wrinkles its brows.

I grew behind your back
and returned your Christmas gift
(your Delphic oracle in an empty box)

unlace your fear.
I bury Electra thoughts
and sing and sing at their funeral.

*Mary Anne Thomas*

The antique shop huddled
on the corner of the leafy lane
barely noticeable
under rambling ivy
that held the old inside.

Stepping down the crumbling brick step
we fell
from one world into another
Like corpses
Horatio Alger books lined one wall
crouching to spring
into a self-made man
once again
On top of this bed of books
glass vases and jewelry twinkled
beneath yellow grease and grey haze
like the sun setting behind a whisper of fog.

We slowly walked back in years
shuffling my old clocks
whose flitting hands
(like numb bees on the edge of winter)
stopped seasons ago.
We breathed in the years
stirring dead dust
until it sifted over us
as night covers the day.

After hours left in years before
we passed up the crumbling brick step
into now
now much older for our deaths.

*Sue Sublett*

He promised that when the weather finally broke he would take her up to the farm in the mountains to see Aunt Pearl and Uncle Dick for a day and a night. Each morning Brenda awoke, looked out of the window by her bed and waited. One sunny morning when the Kudzu was beginning to promise little green leaves Brenda asked, "Papa, has it broke yet? I think it has."

"Now listen," he leaned his great hairy hands on the oak legs, took his glasses off and shook them several times before he continued. "Now listen, I'll say when the weather's broke." His dark bushy brows met in the center of his nose above large sharp steel-grey eyes.

Brenda turned to leave, hoping he would allow her to ease away slowly, but he called out, "Child, come here. Pack up. It's broke. We're leaving in one hour."

The girl ran through the house to her room and flung open the closet door grabbing for the nearest dresses.

Two hours later she and her papa were on the road to the farm in the mountains. As they left the red scarred Piedmont behind, she looked into the back seat of the Plymouth. Her green tattered suitcase lay warming in the sun beside a pair of new hem-stitched sheets sent along by Mama and a bag of red and white striped peppermints - the kind that Great-Grandma especially liked. And carefully placed in the corner of the seat, wrapped in shiny white paper, was a red steak still cold from the butcher's refrigerator.

"Now you watch that the sun don't hit that steak. Why I bet Aunt Pearl's never seen a piece of meat like it. That hog meat they gravy up and eat all the time. No wonder the house smells of grease and Aunt Pearl's big as sin."

The girl closed her eyes and saw Aunt Pearl with large arms of soft flesh, huge pillow breasts and shiny black hair pulled into a hasty but neat knot on her heavily moled back. But mostly she remembered the dark eyes like deep wells with no bottom.

"I like Aunt Pearl."

"Why of course you do, child. She's family. You'd best like her."

"But I really like her."

She remembered the warm newly drawn milk she couldn't swallow and how Aunt Pearl told her to throw the rest into the hog bucket. "Extra treat for old Grumpy," she smiled.

"Papa, I really like her."

The dark brows knitted together again and, as she leaned her head against the sun-warmed leather seat watching the mountains rise up at the end of the road, her fingers lightly brushed the plush armrest. She slept.

Soon they were surrounded by the old house and farm. The clinking and clanking of pots hastily flung onto the stove. They dodged feet scurrying to get wood and more wood, water from the well and more of everything for the unexpected family visit. The old house, mellowed to the color of the leafless trees surrounding it, smoked and steamed with activity, and by the time the sun was over

the barn, which Aunt Pearl said meant almost dinner, the house seemed hot and about to burst open like a ripe plum. Aunt Pearl shuffled back and forth catching her slippered blue swollen feet on the rough floor and swayed from side to side carrying pots and pans, dusty potatoes, and long yellow stalks with turnips dangling from the ends. Great-grandma limped around, wiping her hands on a cross-stitched apron, sucking peppermints, and dodging Aunt Pearl. She occasionally stamped her foot at an eager cat peering in through the porch door. Tall, white-haired Uncle Dick smoked his cigar and talked to the favorite brother-in-law from the Piedmont while Brenda crouched in a corner and listened to Papa's boring talk of textile mills, cotton markets and new inventions to make money. The girl grew sleepy as he droned on and on.

"Come on, honey, let's leave these women alone to prepare that fine steak and all the trimmings. Let's go out to walk before the night chill sets in." Uncle Dick stood, stroked the girl's fire-warmed hair and tugged her to her feet. "You come too," he motioned to Papa, "come see the new roof on the barn."

They walked out into the late colorless winter afternoon. She heard the discontented pigs grunting for food, watched the rooster sneak up on a hen who fluttered away in indignation, and listened to the creaking of the chain holding the bucket over the old well. Her Papa's big fleshy hand rested on Uncle Dick's angular shoulder and she heard him say, "Now Dick, about that steak. Finest piece of meat we get here in the South. Mr. Reed, the butcher back home at the new market, says it's from Kansas City. Can you imagine. All the way from Kansas. Tender - doesn't need much time in the pan."

Uncle Dick made no reply and only looked curiously at the tall, dark man.

"That so," he mumbled.

They walked between apple trees that caught their clothes on reaching snarled arms. Soon they stood in the middle of a sassafras grove. Uncle Dick snapped off three bare sticks exposing the slimy green life inside.

"Chew um. Best toothbrushes there is. I call em nature's. Chew um up fine."

Papa shook his head. "Now, Uncle Dick, the drug store has real toothbrushes made just the right shape to fit your teeth. And they are sterilized and packaged in real nice celluloid boxes. I'll just send you one next time I'm at the post office. Last you six months." He threw down the stick crushing it with his foot.

Brenda ran ahead to the house. She suddenly felt tired of voices. As she neared the house she was drawn on by the pleasant smells of apples stewing, turnips bubbling in greasy pot liquor, and meat cooking mingled with the heavy odor of greasy kerosene and wood smoke.

"Hurry and wash up. Let's get to the table." Aunt Pearl's soft voice floated out from the entrails of the house.

Soon they pulled up to a long polished pine table set with Aunt Pearl's best white china from the department store in town. There was an air of anticipation in the room.

"Yes, sir," Papa mumbled, all the way from Kansas."

Aunt Pearl shuffled in carrying a large yellow platter which sent up a column of smoke into her smiling face.

"Here's that steak, honey - the best I ever cooked."

In the center of the table she placed a platter of brown, greasy gravy covering the strings and shreds of the Kansas' steak.

"Country fried, like you like it, honey." She looked at Papa for approval.

Papa's great hands hit the table like a railroad hammer. His grey eyes flashed. Brenda noticed that Aunt Pearl's usually still deep eyes distinctly if instantly rippled as though a stone was tossed into a well by a mischievous boy.

All eyes were on Papa. The only sound in the room was the scratching of the cat at the screen door.

"Well, Pearl, it's good to be home. Best damn looking meal I ever saw." Papa reached for the platter.

Brenda lay in the dark coldness of the quiet house. She heard the creaking of the bucket above the old well as it rocked back and forth in the wind. She remembered the deep eyes looking from one to the other as they ate the meat. She heard the contented grunting of the hogs as they ate the last remains of the gravy. She pulled the covers up higher and fitted her body against the bed. Her cold toes stroked the sheet.

"I love you Papa," she said aloud to the dark. "I love you lots."

*Clara Seagrave*

## SUMMERTIME IS YUMMERTIME

Summertime is yummertime
and slimmertimes I've seen

crunching . . . munching . . . lunching
on sunflower seeds

sipping . . . dripping . . . lipping
iced tea

Low-cal food never fooled a fatty
and this damn jogging is driving me batty!

Give me the world on a silver platter
turkey, greece, baked alaska
I could eat the parsley
and still get fatter

O that this too too solid flesh
would melt, thaw, and resolve itself
into a dew!
(maybe the bard
was a tub of lard)

I ought to know better
but here I sit
thinking about
a banana split.

*Helen West*

Obscured in a corner
Dark and damp
The young man sat
Waiting for something
I knew not what
Anticipating everything.
I couldn't comprehend
Exactly what he wanted
Exactly what he needed
and so I sat and watched him there
Huddled within the dripping shadows
That fell from the ceiling
All about him.
Finally I spoke
and words tumbled forth.
For they were all I had
and words were not enough.
"Why are you wasting your life
In this dark house
When all your life lies before you
And all the world is turning around you?"
Then he looked up.
His eyes yellow
Red lips parted
And he spoke
As a sage,
"I have seen
A world of hate
A world marred black
With death and filth,
Disease and war,
Lust and famine.
I want it not -
You may have it.
Take it and nurse it to destruction."
I turned and stumbled
From the room.
Shielding my eyes.
From the seeming truth
That blinded them.
Through a door I stumbled on -
Off the porch I tripped and fell
Into a sea of flowers
White and yellow
Green and brown
Then suddenly I
Turned around
As the house began to fall:
Oasis of Apathy
Crumbling down
and I turned
To face the world.

*Marie Storer*

The road to reality
is obstructed by the disillusionment
cast upon the
ever-present concept of creation.
The story is constantly changed
from teacher to teacher
the child can not grasp
for himself
the truisms behind the statements
Each teacher must continue
to promote the
concepts stressed upon them long ago.
The child is intraveinously fed
with death the final outcome
once
the special care and attention
directed upon this child
is now directed upon another
child
who must learn the real
through the disillusioned eyes
of those who teach.

*Emily Nixon*

## TO A FUTURE LOVER

When you come, speak softly,
in cool, clear whispers,
in celebration of cricket-summers.
in celebration of whispers.

When you come, see wheat fields
that I've imagined
standing harvest-brown
against harvest skies
and speak me the reflection.

When you come, see visions
with a prophet's love
of a prophet's God
and write me all
that you have seen.

When you come, come easy,
in cool, clear coming.
I will hear your silence coming.
The tent prepared, then,
will receive you.

when you come
come quickly.

*Cyndy Anchors*

# SMOKE IN THE NIGHT

The furnace rushed on
like five o'clock traffic
on Main Street
But the heat seemed to saunter
teasing me
as it seeped
through vents
that dashed the brown linoleum floor

Dancing heat
Swirling heat
reminding me of long ago
when
that frail girl
too small for my fourteen years
and for the thick braids
that circled my waist
huddled by the hissing fireplace.
I remember hugging
the rhythmic patterns
of grey smoke
that swirled
under my arms
and kissed
my nose

I used to dream that it was Billy Buck,
the grocer's boy,
who was years older (at least two)
with an older smile
and older eyes
which edged inside me.
We had danced at the pigroast in the
sunken barn
while cedar logs
crackled
into orange ashes
and we
like smoke
had disappeared in the dark.

Even now
when I suck in dead cedar and hear home-strung fiddles
I want to circle rhythmically
and rhyme my feet with his
to become
smoke in the night

*Sue Sublett*

The landscape, like a great cat, crouched and stretched before him. He moved along its haunches slowly. The sun crashed down over the cat's skull, the rays of light exploding. The man wished for a cooling wind, and the path narrowed into the pond.

A shower of pebbles and dirt, dislodged by his footsteps, rustled down onto the browning underbrush that covered the bank. He leaned over, chose a small, smooth stone and sent it across the water's surface. It skipped twice, then sank. He stood for a moment, watching the ripples butt edges. He claimed a second stone; clenched his fist hard until sure that the edges had left deep marks on his palm. He dropped it and moved away, catching the bouncing rock in his instep, sending it clattering off the path and into the water.

With an outraged honk, two great white ducks broke through the sparse underbrush of a small island, crashed into the water, into the man's view -- one chased, the other chasing. A vicious vee-pattern disturbed the rock's circular ripples as the second overcame the first. There was a challenge and a brief confrontation before the ducks settled to feeding and before the man lost interest.

His thoughts adapted themselves to the rhythm of his footsteps. As he passed an overhanging elm, he stripped it of a handful of leaves, crushing them, held them in tightly cupped hands, close to his nose. He inhaled their freshness. For no conscious reason, he thought of his mother.

He was nine, it was early summer. He had just awakened and in the early fog of morning, had decided to run away. Slipping out of bed he had dressed quickly, and hurried quietly down the stairs and out onto the street. He had then spent the following two hours trailing hurried merchants, tugging at their aprons, asking for employment. After refusal after first, amused, then stern, then annoyed refusal, his hunger took its toll and he made his way home, assuring himself of a more prepared departure the following morning.

As he entered the kitchen, though, his mother, so upset by her son's unexplained absence, greeted him with a sharp cuff which was followed by a tearful chorus which he himself quickly joined. Hugging him tightly, she made him promise never to leave her again. He hated himself for the way he had so kept that promise.

Sniffing the leaves once more, he threw them to the ground and turned, looking back over the path. He had come farther than he had, at first, intended to come. The land was beautiful to him; the trees were old and strong, their barks tough, showing evidence of long hard winters, and of steamy, wet summers when the lake had overflowed its banks. A rabbit came through the tall grass, feeding. It fled as it saw him. He raised his arm, straightened it and followed the animal's movements with a pointed finger. "Bang." he said. The rabbit disappeared into the grass. Safe.

Swinging his weapon around, he scanned the sky, the brush, and the path itself for another target. Finding none, he dropped his arm to his side and continued on. A great oak stretched its roots across the path, low branches reaching down to just above his head.

Grasping one firmly, he pulled himself into its hollow straddling the limb. Legs swinging, he surveyed his conquered world. The ducks had come into his sight again, having added a number to their ranks. In the shade of a shallow area, a number of fish were swimming in circles above newly established breeding beds. There was a cloudless sky --- a good omen, but for practicality's sake, he deemed it a poor condition, apt to upset his conqueror's spirit. He had done well indeed, he mused, very well.

His world was to be shared however. A young woman, lost in her own thinking, approached the water's edge and settling there, waited as the ducks swam toward her. They came quickly. She opened a large paper bag and began tearing bread slices into smaller sections, tossing them into the water. He examined this intruder carefully, and maintained his examination in utmost secrecy.

When the birds had gleaned all food from the water's surface, they mounted the bank and soon surrounded her, beaks nudging the folds of her shirtwaist. Her hands were browned, the fingers lean, long, curved now as she stroked a smooth white neck. He had once loved a girl who had had hands like those. His thoughts were interrupted as two of the larger birds rose up against each other. One grabbed the other by its fragile-seeming neck with the apparent intention of snapping it into. The girl threw two chunks of bread at them. The squabble ended.

"They'll just start up again," he said, half expecting her to jump at the sound of his voice. He was disappointed.

"I know, but, at least I won't have to watch it."

Her hair had been pulled back and was tied loosely with a ribbon. The long walk to the pond and the movement of her head had loosed the knot. Stray hairs were caught by the almost constant breeze. She reached to brush them from her eyes.

Swinging down from his perch, he walked slowly to the shore and sat about a yard from her.

"My name," she said as she reached into the bag for some more bread, ". . . is . . ." she handed some to him, "Anna."

He waited for her to say more; she didn't. He took the bread and began to tear it. Seeing that no additional information was forthcoming, he fumbled around for a way to introduce himself, he wanted his name to sound warm to her. In desperation he said simply, "Mine is Daniel Christopher."

"Is that -- is Christopher your last name, or is it a double first name---or whatever that would be called?"

"No, its the last name." He answered, cursing himself. Again he waited for more that didn't come. He held the bread out stiffly to a lone duck. As it grabbed the bread, its beak caught Daniel's fingers. It surprised him and he dropped it quickly. Realizing what had happened, she laughed. It was a beautifully disarming laugh, and flushing, he joined her in it. There was no further communication between them. He looked out over the water. As she continued feeding the birds, she began to sing softly under her breath. He recognized the song as an old Irish ballad.

"blow ye winds softly
blow ye winds strong
blow ye winds easy

bring my love home,
blow ye winds easy
bring my love home."

Her voice was low, the ducks seemed to enjoy the deep almost harsh free rhythm. It first charmed Daniel, then alternately irritated and soothed him. The ballad was long and probably very old, he thought. She finished the verses and began to hum. Seeing that she had no intention of telling him anything about herself, Daniel determined to pry into it.

"Do you come out here often?" he interrupted.

"Umhmm." she nodded and began to repeat the verses:

Sea gull in the harbor
flies high, then low,
searching for true love.

No love she'll know
searching for true love
no love she'll know.

She emptied the last of the crumbs onto the water as the song ended. Soon all the ducks had left. They played near the bank for a time, hoping for more handouts. When none came, they drifted farther and farther out to the lake's center.

Anna brushed her hair from her eyes, and felt for the ribbon. Daniel reached over and pulled it free. Lifting her hair in her hand she set it over one shoulder and lay back on the bank.

"Once, when I was little, a girl sat in front of me in school, who always kept her hair tied back, she had a ribbon a lot like this one I think," he turned it over and over in his hands. "I pulled it out one day to see if she would scream."

"Did she?"

"No, I expected her to, but she didn't."

"Did you keep it?" she asked.

"For a while I did. She never asked me for it, and if she had I probably wouldn't have returned it. I did, finally. I asked her not to put it in again. Her hair was so nice down, I thought."

"And what did this little girl do?"

"As soon as I had given it to her, she put it back in her hair and never spoke to me again."

Feeling that he was requiring a reply of her, Anna smiled. Crooking her arm across her face, she said nothing. Holding out her other hand, she motioned for him to return the ribbon to her. No ribbon was returned.

She opened one eye to find him grinning broadly at her, dangling the material inched beyond her grasp. She lowered her hand, he lowered the ribbon. She rose quickly and he, underestimating her agility, lost his prize.

She put the ribbon in her pocket and remained upright. Placing his hand on her back he let her hair rest in his hand, gently twisting some of its strands between his fingers. She looked out across the water, seeming to avoid his stare, crumpling the paper bag and empty bread wrappers together. He rose, seeing she was about to do so, and extended his hand to her. She took it and he pulled her to her feet,

close to him. He caught her other hand, saying nothing. She smiled, yet it was not the smile he had planned for. She was lovely he thought, studying her now as he had studied her earlier. There was a hardness about her mouth that he did not sense. He searched her eyes, and saw only his reflection peering back into his own sad face.

She turned suddenly and walked from him. He watched her as she moved away, his reflection clouding out her eyes in the memory. Smiling with an odd sense of contentment, he followed after her.

*Cyndy Anchors*

## ORNITHOLOGIST

A grey bird
flew down
from my holly tree.
I don't know what kind he was
but I'll remember him
by what he left
on my patio.

*Helen West*

## FLIGHT

Like
desperate animals
tumbling
from
woven wood
she flew away
throwing green eyes
over her shoulder
A metronome
watching you watching me
in cafe crowds

Hunted, haunted, she scurried
past a blind man
whose tapping cane
felt her flight
in echoing pavement
and
past ginger trees
genuflecting in the wind
Eyeswept
you hid behind
humping umbrellas and salt-singed waiters
even though your lemon shirt
rose
out of the crowd
of blues and greens

I couldn't help but smile at your
caught-smoking-in-the-bathroom-look
and so
you bent close
and asked
in fish-breath
if I'd like another cognac.

*Sue Sublett*

## SPROUT

You have to do the snaps
1. . 2 . . . 3 . 4 . . . 5 . . . . 6
or the rain leaks in your front.
The yellow hood fits down to the collar
so your head doesn't get wet
but it leaks in on your neck sometimes.

Mrs. Whitelaw checks you on your way
out of the cloak room
and says
    Good-bye, children!
    Don't get wet!

You get outside
Ahhhhhh . . .
The rain blip blips on your face
and you can catch some on your tongue.

The playground is muddy
and your tennis shoes sqush
when you walk.

The street gutters carry leaves
down the drain
like boats going over the falls

And the birds hide in the magnolia tree
on the corner of the yard
so they won't drown in the rain

The rain beats loud on the tin roof gutter
that runs all the rain down
into a muddy pool behind the azaleas
under the kitchen windows.

And your mother takes your things off
on the rug at the door
and you sit inside at the window
and watch the wet.

*Helen West*

## BLACKBIRD

I brush
    broken dreams
from my shoulders
                like the blackbird
                sifting
                delicate snow
                from the dead magnolia tree
                                with severed feet

*Sue Sublett*

## WINNIE

Brenda thought her sister, Winnie, looked like the picture of the girl in the weekly Post magazine - the girl who posed for the cola ads and always held a parasol in summer and wore a fur hat in winter. Brenda stood with the others - although a little apart from the aunts and uncles who huddled together in groups whispering and nudging and nodding. They waited at the station for an hour for the train to come, and the flowers she held were beginning to look like the flowers on her mama's hat - wilted and out of style. But maybe Winnie will like them anyhow, she thought, as she looked down the track for the light. Zinnias were her favorite even though they always had little bugs biting the leaves that gave them a curious scalloped effect. Last ones of the year, her mama said that morning when she stuffed them into the empty syrup container to keep them fresh.

Two years ago Winnie left from this same station only no one was here to see the light come down the track and to see her get on the train. She left quietly in the night - a shame, her aunt said - a pretty girl like Winnie going to New York to work backstage at a theater. With a rough crowd - you remember the ones who came to town with the Amos and Andy Show in '22. Oh yeah, they were nice and all that on stage but behind the scenes - well, you know those actors. And a nice girl like Winnie who can cook and sew ought to be settling down right here with a good boy. Winnie left in the night with a silent kiss on her cat's head, trod the old back steps and closed the house door with a slight bang. She left a message different like she was. She wrote on the mirror - In New York - Winnie. That was all.

But now two years later - Brenda's thoughts returned to the shuffling and bending groups looking down the track as they waited for the light that meant Winnie's homecoming. She wondered if Winnie had been happy in New York, would they all be there to meet her with the Zinnias, the hats, and freshly washed cars. Or was it because of the letters she wrote telling of the play's closing, the lack of work in the city and the landlady who could understand only so long. Then the job at Woolworth's behind the record counter hearing "I Can't Give You Anything but Love, Baby," forty or fifty times a day until the tune woke her in the night. Her letters were quick, sad, and honest like Winnie with her wide blue eyes and wiry red hair. Times were hard but Winnie must report things as they were - being Winnie.

One day in Mama's parlor two aunts sat and drank Sherry. Their one glass before lunch, they always managed to say. Aunt Eleanor told Mama she knew Brenda would take a lesson from all this - there was poor Winnie in the city practically starving to death in that dirty room, and no wonder, the Lord surely was sending her a sign that she was wrong to have left home for those theater people. Mama nodded in agreement. Why, Mama thought Winnie was spunky to go to New York! She heard her say to go, Winnie, don't dry up here in this place. But now she nodded with Aunt Eleanor that the Lord was sending a sign. Brenda left the room. The Sherry bottle on the kitchen counter was almost empty and she knocked it over into

the sink and lightly kicked the door.

Winnie was pretty. Thinness added to her quiet translucent face, and the dark circles brightening the blue of her eyes. She looked older but satiny like nice teacups. Her red hair was pulled back into a knot, but here and there a fuzzy curl floated free recalling the girlish Winnie who left two years ago. She was dirty from the train and her soft voice was lost beneath the grinding of the wheels as she called hello. The aunts and cousins embraced her, stroked her red hair, patted her face, called her pale, and led her home. She was gently pushed into a corner of the sofa, brought great-grandma's special boiled custard for sick folks and covered with the afghan.

"Now we won't ask details, child, but we were mighty glad you got some sense and came home," Grandma said.

"That's a big wicked city," Cousin Lula interjected, while Cousins Bertie and Helen, the two faded twins, sat and shook their heads at each other like molting parakeets.

"Yes, child, you will be fattened up in no time and then Mr. Gurley needs a girl to help in his chicken plant. You're a lucky girl to have a family who takes care of you and has connections. Why we're so glad you're back and knew you would come soon. I felt it in my bones and Grandma dreamed she saw you on a long train with a scarf blowing across your face. I knew that meant you needed us and when your letter came asking for money, I said to Catherine that child needs her family. Send her a check today. We'll all chip in."

Winnie hardly said a word except thank you, yes mam, and the custard was good. She sat fingering the antimacassar and drawing circles with her right foot on the rug.

"Now you go to bed. We all love you, honey, and are glad you are back from that dreadful place. Come on, this child needs her rest." Helen, the biggest cousin beckoned them to the door.

Each cousin, aunt, and uncle filed past Winnie, kissed her lightly on the forehead, and patted her hand.

"Sleep tight, you'll fatten up right smart in no time, we always knew you belonged to us. No sense feeling like you let us down by leaving like that. Goodnight, honey."

The house was quiet. Winnie lay in her bed in the room that connected to Brenda's where new curtains hung at the windows and fresh paint shone on the window sills. The room's clean smell of anticipation now mingled with the smell of musty clothes and the lingering stale odor of the train.

When Brenda saw the light come on in Winnie's room she silently cracked the door. Winnie sat up in bed with her hands covering her face.

"Winnie, can I get you some warm milk or more boiled custard?"

"Boiled custard - just like when old Janet next door died, they ran to see who could be first there with the potato salad and custard, and they look around in church - to see who's there, they always say - why you know it's to see who's not there. Poor little Winnie is home from poverty into the arms of her family." Tears now squirted out of her eyes as she laughed.

Brenda wanted to leave the room when Winnie lay back on the pillow hard. She was still laughing as Brenda quietly closed the door. She reached for Tommy, her old rag doll who fit right between her knees every night. She found her bed in the dark and looked through the sheer curtains at the night sky. The moon was old but still bright enough to shine on the kudzu clinging to the hill by the house. The kudzu held the hill in place her mama told her, but it was a good thing it died each winter or the world would be covered up, but it needed to grow back each spring to hold things right. Brenda listened to the silence from Winnie's room and wondered if Winnie would cut her hands as she skinned Mr. Gurley's chickens and if her feet would swell like Mrs. Peter's. Would she get doughy and loose like the James sisters? She pulled back the covers, picked up old Tommy and walked down the hall. Winnie was asleep. Her red hair lay loose on the pillow all around her face in ringlets and her fingers made little fists like you see on new babies and old people. Brenda lightly moved the covers just enough to slide Tommy down beside Winnie's freckled arm up close to her thin shoulder.

*Clara Seagrave*

A thousand unfamiliar faces
Rushing, crowding, seething, breaking as
They serge around me.
I must withstand them, resist them.
I guard my treasure, my identity.

To be part of them, I would lose it.
I am an island in their midst.
The current is washing away my shores.

*Pat Duncan*

# AT THE LAKE

We walked
in powdery tire tracks
on the clay road
leaving our own tracks
behind in the red dust.

Sweat drops tickled
down our backs
and made dark spots
on our faded cotton swim suits.

Jenny held her towel capestyle
over her back
and strutted --
a proud princess.

While I in my cape
as Superman
dashed ahead
down the road
to conquer the sand crickets
on the beach.

I jumped first
hugging my knees
and Jenny followed

The smell of the creosote pilings
in the sun
and the metallic taste of the water
didn't bother us.
We just swam and played
in the coolness.

Our towels
hanging off the dock
were scarey ghosts
waiting to catch us
when we got out of the water.

The sand stuck to our wet feet and ankles
until the sun began drying us.
Then retracing our footprints
in the road
we returned home.

*Helen West*

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